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A Lesson on True Forgiveness; Matt 18:21-35

GPBC

2.21.21

Introduction – Last Sunday we looked at vv15-20, which provided an outline, a 4 step process, to pursue reconciliation when a brother sins against us. In order for reconciliation to occur, the guilty party must repent of sin. If the sinner displays defiant, ongoing unrepentance, he shows himself an unbeliever. If he listens to the prayerful, humble, loving rebukes of his fellow believers and repents, then he is restored to fellowship with God and with the church.

This is one side of reconciliation. Today's text addresses the other side of reconciliation. If a brother sins against us, we should not only seek his repentance, we must also be ready to forgive. Once repentance on the one side and forgiveness on the other side has taken place, reconciliation is complete.

But as the saying goes, forgiveness is easier said than done. If someone sins against us, we might find it easier to confront them to repent than freely offer forgiveness. The natural, easy, sinful reaction on our part would be to hold on to that hurt, to keep a grudge, to allow bitterness and hatred to fester and grow in our hearts. As with all sins, at first, bitterness feels right. He's a bad person who has done a bad thing, I shouldn't like him, trust him, or ever speak to him again. That feels right and good at first, but that bitterness will slowly drain us of any capacity to trust anyone and it will kill our joy of fellowship. Slowly, but surely, unforgiveness will make us miserable inside and miserable to others.

Forgiveness actually frees us. It doesn't feel good at first. It feels like the offender is getting off too easy. But in the long run, a heart free from anger and hurt, is a heart free to love and trust and take chances and believe and go the extra mile and love. You see, when someone sins against us, God's work is not finished when He has worked repentance into the offender's heart. It's only complete when God has worked the grace of forgiveness in our own hearts. Forgiveness is learning to delight in the forgiveness of God and letting the bitterness go.

- I. True Forgiveness Knows No Limits (vv21-22)
  - a. Peter probably thought Jesus was about to give him a high five or a "that a boy" here. According to rabbinic discussion, if someone

commits the same sin against you, you should forgive that person three times, but on the fourth offence, you are not obliged to forgive. Instead of 3 strikes and you're out, it was four strikes and you're out!

- i. Peter was probably thinking, I'm going to double what's expected so how about 7? Surely that is going the extra mile.
- b. Jesus, as He often does with our notions of morality, turns Peter's calculations on its head. No, Peter, not 7 times but 77 times. Now we know Jesus does not mean, keep a running tally of offences and once your brother sins against you 78 times, that's it. He is not to be forgiven. No, we understand Jesus is speaking hyperbole here. No one is going to keep track of 77 offences and that's the point.
- c. Forgiveness is not regulated by a calculation of offences. Forgiveness is a state of the heart, and therefore, it knows no limits! By 77 Jesus is saying, concerning your heart and your relation to God and to others, you just keep forgiving. True forgiveness knows no limits.
- d. We might be thinking right about now what Peter may have been thinking and so Jesus illustrates his point in parable fashion.

## II. True Forgiveness is Modeled After God's Forgiveness (vv23-27)

- a. Vv23-24 – This is how forgiveness in the kingdom of heaven works and since you are in the kingdom of heaven, this is how you are to forgive.
  - i. The king discovers one of his servants owes him 10,000 talents. If you translate that figure into our currency today, this servant owed the king millions of dollars, some say, it might even be a billion by our standards today. In other words, it was an amount impossible to pay.
  - ii. This servant stood indebted to the king under an impossible debt. There is no way he could ever repay it or make it right.
  - iii. Jesus' point, of course, we are that servant. We stand under a debt of sin against the King that is impossible to pay. There is no way we can settle our account with God. It's too much.
- b. V25 – in other words the servant would be punished until he could pay. He was guilty. He had wronged the king. He must face punishment. His only recourse would be to pay off the debt.
  - i. But of course, facing punishment for his crime would leave him in double misery. Not only is the amount out of his reach, now

the circumstance he has put himself in, leaves the debt even further from his reach. He is left in a destitute situation of his own making.

- ii. Jesus' point – that's us as sinners. We are guilty before God. We face the just punishment of God for our crimes against Him. The only way to rectify it is for us to make it right, but we can never make our selves right before God. His own doing is his undoing. Our own doing is our undoing. This man's debt is his doom. Our sin is our doom.
- c. Vv26-27 – but then we come to vv26-27. The servant pleads with the king. He throws himself at his mercy. And wonder of wonders, he finds this king happens to be a king with compassion. He's not only just; He's merciful.
  - i. In fact, the king is so merciful, he goes beyond what is expected or even imagined. He not only releases him, he forgives the debt that was stacked against him. The king not only removes the punishment, he also removes the record of debt.
  - ii. What a powerful picture of God's forgiveness in our salvation! God not only removes the punishment for our sin through Christ, He also removes the record of our sin through Christ!
  - iii. I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore. Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more. But the master of the sea heard my despairing cry. From the waters lifted me, now safe am I. Love lifted me!
  - iv. I had a debt I could not pay. He paid a debt He did not owe. I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song, "Amazing Grace" all day long, Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.
  - v. If we would only cry out to Him for mercy, Jesus not only releases us from the chains of our own doing, He also forgives us of every wrong.
- d. The reason why true forgiveness knows no limits is because it is modeled after God's forgiveness. The key to knowing the freeing power of true forgiveness is to forgive others as God has forgiven us. We forgive offences over and over and over again without number because God has forgiven our offences against Him over and over

and over again without number. And no matter how deep the anguish and hurt of those who offend us, our sin against God is far greater. For we have never done for others what God has done for us. We have never been offended to the degree that we have offended God.

- i. III. You don't know what he has done to me. I can't forgive him! No, you can't. But through Christ, you can!
- e. His forgiveness knows no bounds. And when we look to His forgiveness, we will find the strength and compassion and humility to also forgive.

### III. Withholding Forgiveness is Not An Option for Believers (vv28-35)

- a. V28 – this servant acts in a totally opposite manner than the king. This servant doesn't act or look or follow the king's example at all. In fact, he goes beyond the king's just nature to an extreme. He's missing gratitude.
  - i. A denarius is about a day's wage. So this second servant owes the first servant far, far less than he owed the king. That's Jesus' point. Whatever we are owed is far less than what we owe God, who is compassionate and forgiving!
  - ii. This servant reacts with violent retaliation. Notice, he's chocking him before he even speaks to him. He looks nothing at all like his king, does he?
- b. V29 – the second servant pleads just like the first servant. V30 – this servant, totally forgets that he himself had been forgiven a greater debt.
- c. Vv31-34 – the day of reckoning comes. The day of reckoning always comes.
- d. V35 – Jesus summarizes the point of the parable.

Conclusion – You see there are two sides to reconciliation. The offender must repent, and the offended must forgive. That's true repentance, true forgiveness, and true reconciliation because it is patterned after our own salvation. When we repent to God, He forgives us, and we are reconciled to God. If you have experienced reconciliation with God, you will pursue reconciliation with a brother.

Those who repent show themselves believers. Those who do not show themselves as unbelieving, preferring sin over salvation. In the same way, those who forgive show themselves as those who have known God's forgiveness. Those who refuse to forgive show themselves as those who have never known the forgiveness of God. When sin separates brothers, two things must occur if we truly believe. Repentance and forgiveness. Both are difficult to do from the heart. But if we will look to God, we will find the strength and grace to treat others as He has treated us in Christ!